

# In the Classroom

## **A Guide to IPA Implementation in FLES Programs**

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In the fall of 2010, two graduate students in foreign language education, a university foreign language education professor, and an elementary Spanish teacher came together to brainstorm how to assess the proficiency of fourth and fifth grade elementary school Spanish students. The difficulty was finding a practical option for a Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES) program consisting of 200 students whom the teacher saw daily for 15 minutes. A number of assessments do exist which target language learners in the elementary grades and are useful for evaluating achievement of program benchmarks, such as the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) or the Early Language Listening and Proficiency Assessment (ELLOPA). The Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA), however, was chosen for this project based on several advantages, including its nature as the foundation for a specific unit of instruction, ease of implementation by teachers, and analytical feedback for each individual student.

### The Integrated Performance Assessment

The IPA is a standards-based performance assessment for classroom use. As the culmination of a project entitled “Beyond the OPI,” the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) was developed and piloted by researchers Eileen Glisan, Bonnie Adair-Hauck, Keiko Koda, Elvira Swender, and Paul Sandrock to rate student proficiency in the three modes of communication as identified in the first goal area of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (i.e., National Standards). The assessment prototype and the accompanying rubrics were published in *The IPA Manual*. A subsequent 2006 article further described the prototype and the rubrics, which were tested and revised based on the experiences and feedback of 30 teachers and 445 elementary, middle, and high school students in six pilot districts who participated in the project. Following the initial project, Glisan, Daniel Uribe, and Adair-Hauck tested the feasibility of the prototype in a university-level Spanish course.

While research exists on the implementation of the IPA at the university, high school, and middle school levels, there are few

examples of IPA implementation in elementary school foreign language programs. In response to this need, this article provides a step-by-step guide to creating an IPA for the young foreign language learner and presents an IPA developed for use with elementary school language learners.

### What is the IPA?

According to *The IPA Manual*, the IPA rates student performance in each of the three modes of communication described in the National Standards: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. A common theme provides an authentic premise for communication in the assessment. Students gain content knowledge in each task of the assessment and apply that knowledge in subsequent tasks. For example, students apply the knowledge gained in the interpretive task when completing the interpersonal task. Likewise, students use the knowledge gained in the interpersonal task to accomplish the presentational task. As students complete each task, the teacher rates the performance using the appropriate rubric from *The IPA Manual*. Rubrics are provided for the Novice, Intermediate, and Pre-Advanced levels for each of the three modes of communication. Before moving on to the next task, the teacher offers the students descriptive feedback using the rubric to guide the conversation and assist the student in setting goals for future performances.

### Backward Design

*The IPA Manual* promotes the use of backward design in assessment and instruction. In her August 2010 President’s Message in *The Language Educator*, Eileen Glisan encouraged the profession to “envision the big picture of program design” through backward design. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, in their 2005 book, *Understanding by Design*, describe the process as one in which teachers function like architects or engineers using the standards of their profession to shape and inform the outcomes of their work. Wiggins and McTighe state that “our lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the results sought, not derived from the methods,

books, and activities with which we are most comfortable.” From this perspective, a three-stage planning process begins with the design of the assessment. In the first step, the teacher identifies desired outcomes. Once the targets for performance have been identified, the teacher determines acceptable evidence. In the final step, teachers plan learning experiences and instruction. Equipped with a clear picture of the desired performance, a teacher can design instructional activities suited to his or her students.

## The Elementary Spanish Program

The Spanish program at this school covered grades K–8. In grades K–5, students had 15 minutes of Spanish instruction daily with Señorita H. In grades 6–8, students had 40 minutes of Spanish instruction daily with Señorita D. The current IPA was designed for the students in fourth and fifth grade. At this school, there were two sections of combined fourth and fifth graders, with 24 students in each class. Señorita H held a Master’s in Foreign Language Teaching and modeled her instruction off many of the recommendations made in the book *Languages and Children: Making the Match* by Helena Curtain and Carol Ann Dahlberg. Señorita H taught 95% of the time in Spanish and designed her instruction around thematic units.

## Step 1: Creation of the Interpretive Task

The first step of IPA implementation is to develop the IPA itself. Since the thematic unit planned for this particular semester focused on “El Mar Caribe” [the Caribbean sea], students were studying ocean life, beach activities, weather, islands, and clothing. Therefore, the following scenario was created to motivate the IPA:

*You are a freelance reporter for Viajar, a Spanish language magazine for travelers. Your boss wants you to write an article on the Caribbean. So, you begin by researching beach life.*

Based on this scenario and the theme of the unit, a text was needed that students could interpret as their research on beach life. To find this text, we went to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and searched terms such as “la playa y niños” [the beach and children] and “el Caribe para niños” [the Caribbean for children]. This search yielded a video called “Calliou se va a la playa.” This cartoon was authentic in that it was created by native speakers of Spanish for children who spoke Spanish. Although it was designed for young learners around the age of five, the fourth and fifth graders reported that they loved the cartoon because it reminded them of their childhood.

Once the video was chosen, we began to create the task that how to develop it. The first section was key word recognition. In this section, students were asked to write the Spanish word heard in the video for each of the 10 words listed in English. Because these were Novice-level learners, cognates as well as words to which the students had previous exposure were included. The second section of this task asked students to identify important ideas from the video. In this section, students were asked to iden-

tify whether the ideas listed were present in the video. The third section asked students to summarize the main idea of the video in English. It was important that the interpretive task was in English to ensure that students had understood the video.

## Step 2: Creation of the Interpersonal Task

The interpersonal task presented more of a challenge. Interpersonal tasks must entail spontaneous communication that is not pre-planned or rehearsed. In addition, they should require the negotiation of meaning, or, in more specific terms, a give-and-take between pairs of students where they react to what is said, ask for clarification, pose follow-up questions, etc. Typically, students are given a topic with some points to cover and are asked to converse for a certain amount of time. Many experts have asserted the need to scaffold young learners in interpersonal communication.

To scaffold our learners, we decided to structure the interpersonal communication task as a picture difference task using two pictures of a beach scene. These pictures were slightly different in terms of the color of the people’s clothing, the number of objects that appeared in each picture, and the location of objects. For example, a boy was wearing a blue bathing suit in Picture A and a purple bathing suit in Picture B. In Picture A, there were three palm trees whereas there were only two in Picture B. Students would be placed in pairs with one student receiving Picture A and one Picture B. They would be asked not to look at each other’s pictures. For this task, students would be given three minutes to communicate orally to find the differences in each of their pictures. They would be read the following prompt:

*You and your partner work for a huge magazine company that has offices in Pittsburgh and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The June issue of the magazine has to go to press today, but there is one big problem. The printing machines messed up and changed the images some, so you have to fix this. One of you lives and works in Pittsburgh, the other in Puerto Rico. You must ask your partner questions in Spanish to figure out the differences between the two pictures. Your boss is also on this conference call and only speaks Spanish. Try to be as descriptive as you can and use as much detail as possible. The more complete sentences you can use the better.*

A student teacher was asked to supervise the class while Señorita H assessed pairs in the hallway outside of the classroom. Each interpersonal conversation was recorded on video.

## Step 3: Creation of the Presentational Task

The third task of the IPA, the presentational communication task, can be written or spoken. It involves one-way presentation of a message and, unlike the interpersonal task, it is not spontaneous but rather is planned and rehearsed. Presentational tasks do not have to be formal events with each student standing individually in front of the class. For this task, students were given the following prompt:

*Your boss at the magazine needs your help yet again. He has asked you to write several paragraphs describing the Caribbean in which you talk about the weather, the things you can do, how to get around and types of wildlife. Because this is for publication, please be sure that your writing is neat and can be read.*

## Step 4: Implementation

Because students have Spanish for only 15 minutes each day, this IPA occurred over seven days. The following table outlines the activity on each day.

Day 1	<b>Interpretive Task</b> – Students watched video twice and completed written task.
Day 2	<b>Feedback on Interpretive Task</b> – Teacher showed the video again and reviewed all answers. Students received their scored task along with the accompanying rubric.
Day 3	<b>Interpersonal Task</b> (1 hour session with Class A) – Students were pulled out of class in pairs to complete the picture difference task. A student teacher supervised the students.
Day 4	<b>Interpersonal Task</b> (1 hour session with Class B)
Day 5	<b>Feedback on Interpersonal Task</b> – This was provided in the group setting. Each student received a rubric and the teacher discussed common difficulties as well as strategies for improved interpersonal communication.
Day 6	<b>Presentational Task</b> – Students were given 15 minutes to answer the presentational prompt, without the assistance of their peers, their teacher, or any dictionaries.
Day 7	<b>Feedback on the Presentational Task</b> – Students' texts were returned along with the accompanying rubric. Students presented these orally in the following days, but these oral presentations were not rated as part of the IPA.

As the table illustrates, an entire class period was devoted to feedback the day after each of the three communication tasks. This day of feedback is an essential component of the IPA because the feedback sessions are necessary to prepare students for the following task and to help students set goals for future performance. When scoring student performance, the official rubrics from *The IPA Manual* were used. However, to report outcomes to students, we developed student-friendly rubrics that were worded positively and highlighted what the student was able to do, not what the student failed to do. [To view an example of a rubric used in this project, go to [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org) and click on "See It in *The Language Educator*?"]

The most challenging task to implement within the constraints of time was the interpersonal task. For this task, we negotiated with homeroom teachers in advance and secured additional time on these days. Two pairs of students could be pulled out of the class at a time because there were two assessors. Had this not been the case, more than an hour would most likely have been needed to assess all 12 pairs of students in the class. Students who were absent from class were assessed the next morning when they arrived at school or during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) when the homeroom teacher allowed students to be assessed.

Ideally, the feedback on the interpersonal task would be tailored to each individual student. Again, within the constraints of time, this did not seem possible in this FLES program. For that reason, interpersonal feedback was given to the class as a whole. Davin's research has shown, however, that when support and assistance directed to one student is given in the presence of the entire class, many of the students in class can also benefit. [Learn more about this specific research on the ACTFL website. Go to [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org) and click on "See It in *The Language Educator*?"]

## Impact on Instruction

Multiple changes occurred in the teacher's practice as a result of this process of planning and implementing the IPA. The first was simply that the assessment was planned in advance, allowing the performance envisioned in the assessment to guide the development of the unit. The notion of backward design, described earlier, was new for Señorita H. Second, with the performance targets identified in the IPA, Señorita H was able to determine what knowledge and skill sets the students would need to successfully complete the assessment. Third, she created lessons that integrated these skills and information into instructional activities. Throughout the unit, Señorita H familiarized students with interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational instructional tasks that were similar to those in the IPA. Her instruction began to take the shape of the upcoming assessment cycle, thereby integrating teaching, learning, and assessment in concrete ways. Finally, through ongoing feedback on performance tasks throughout the unit, the teacher familiarized students with the rubrics used in the IPA. Additionally, students became familiar with using feedback to improve performance, another feature of the IPA that they would experience when participating in the IPA assessment cycle.

## Final Considerations

Without a doubt, the process described above requires time, energy, and planning. While formative assessments of various kinds occur throughout the school year, the IPA functions as a summative assessment to assess progress toward meeting the goals of the National Standards. In this particular program, students leave the

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## RESOURCES

### References

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### Publications

The main content of *The ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessment Manual* (i.e., *The IPA Manual*) has been largely incorporated into the new ACTFL publication, *The Keys to Assessing Language Performance*, published in late 2010. While *The IPA Manual* is still available for purchase separately, specific examples and all the appendixes are available in the more recent and up-to-date *Keys* publication.

Go to the ACTFL Online Store at [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org) (under “Membership”) to pick up your copies of the following helpful resources:

#### *The ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessment Manual*

This booklet helps teachers assess students’ progress toward the K–12 standards as well as students’ language proficiency within the framework of *The ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners*. \$18.00

#### *The ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners*

While the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* are the content standards that define the “what” of foreign language learning in American classrooms, the *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners* are the performance standards that define the “how well.” Each booklet contains a removable 17” x 32” poster of the Guidelines. \$12.00

#### *The Keys to Assessing Language Performance*

Written by language expert Paul Sandrock, this manual clarifies precisely what language educators need to understand in order to successfully assess student performance. Relevant to new teachers and seasoned professionals alike, Sandrock provides step-by-step guidance on how to design assessments, illuminates the process of designing rubrics that focus on proficiency and helps educators create assessments that motivate students to offer language samples that accomplish authentic purposes. \$26.95

#### *Languages and Children: Making the Match*

With a focus on communicative language teaching as it reflects cognitive and second language acquisition theory, authors Helena Curtain and Carol Ann Dahlberg provide a wealth of strategies and activities ready to use in the K–8 foreign language classroom. This updated classic textbook is also accessible and engaging for undergraduate students. \$88.00

#### *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century\**

This document includes the updated text of the original *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, plus nine sections devoted to the standards for specific languages: Arabic, Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. These standards define what students should know and be able to do in foreign language in grades 4, 8, and 12. Several of the languages also extend to grade 16. The standards are intended to serve as a gauge for excellence, as states and local districts carry out their responsibilities for the curriculum in the schools. \$27.50

\*Note: This publication is not available online. Contact the ACTFL membership department at [membership@actfl.org](mailto:membership@actfl.org) or (703) 894-2000 for more information.

### Videos

**World Language Assessment: Get in the Mode!**  
[www.ecb.org/worldlanguageassessment](http://www.ecb.org/worldlanguageassessment)

See segments on “Assessing Communication” and “Assessments for Learning” for additional examples of IPAs in classrooms, including an elementary school example.

**Teaching Foreign Languages K–12: A Library of Classroom Practices**

[www.learner.org/resources/series185.html](http://www.learner.org/resources/series185.html)

See program #3 (Assessment Strategies).





Midway through this four-month project, one of the researchers came to the school to observe and found that the teacher had created an interactive task, using this beach scene, mirroring the interpersonal task in the IPA.

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fifth grade and enter their middle school Spanish classroom with IPA results that the teacher can use to inform planning and instruction. In addition, the assessment results provide placement data for the Spanish teachers at the other middle schools in the area that some students attend.

While IPA implementation can be a time-consuming process at the beginning, with practice comes expertise and a clearer integration of planning, instruction, and assessment. Our IPA results revealed strengths and weaknesses of this Spanish program, thus

functioning as a tool for reflective practice and program improvement. For example, the interpretive communication task was by far the most difficult for these students. The low scores on this task highlighted the need to incorporate more literacy activities in this particular program. While IPA implementation may look different across different language programs, in this instance it was a practical and affordable assessment of young language learners' proficiency. Having performance data for students is essential to prove the efficacy of our programs and to promote students' future language learning and development.

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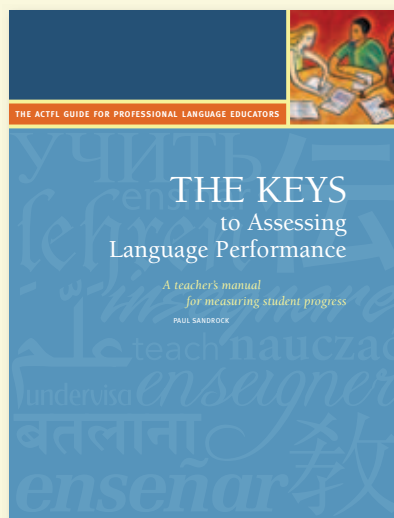
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